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Diverse Views of Religious Pluralism: Implications for the Military Chaplaincy

by

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenge religious pluralism poses for military chaplains and the chaplaincy. Among religious scholars and theologians there is an on-going debate about the meaning of pluralism. The dialogue suggests the interpretation of religious pluralism depends upon personal religious beliefs and how the meaning of "religion" is framed. The implication is that the interpretation of religious pluralism may influence how religious diversity is embraced and how religious accommodation is achieved. Drawing from literature on religious pluralism and intergroup behavior, along with input from several military chaplains, a conceptual analysis is presented that explores how distinctive views of religious pluralism within the chaplaincy may influence the attitudes and behaviors of military chaplains and the strategic direction of the chaplaincy organization.

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"Religious pluralism is an important fact, as well as a significant factor in our society and in our world . . . However, what religious pluralism really means depends not so much on the fact of religious pluralism itself, but upon how one interprets the meaning and significance of this fact."

(Massanari, 1998)

The concept of religious pluralism is most often associated with religious diversity and religious accommodation, i.e., the need for organizations to accommodate the diverse religious beliefs of their workers (Bennett, 2001; Elsasser, 1999). Broadly, religious pluralism reflects the idea that members of diverse religious backgrounds are able to participate in and develop their traditional beliefs within the confines of a common environment. This generally translates into organizational policies, programs, and actions that address these various religious needs (Anonymous, 2000; Bennett, 2001). Among religious scholars and theologians, however, there is an on-going and often intense debate on the meaning and understanding of religious pluralism itself (cf. Dupuis, 1997; Koyama, 1999; Okholm & Phillips, 1995; Osman, 1998; Rowe, 1999). While the definition of "pluralism" in general – that is, encompassing more than one – would appear to be clearly understood in a religious context, the dialogue among scholars suggests that the interpretation of religious pluralism in particular depends upon one's personal religious beliefs and how one frames the meaning of "religion." Moreover, each individual construct of religious pluralism typically is associated with a specific action agenda as part of its respective meaning (Massanari, 1998). The implication is that how one interprets religious pluralism may influence how religious diversity is embraced and how religious accommodation is achieved. For persons charged with the responsibility for providing religious support within an organization, the relationship between pluralism views, religious diversity, and accommodation is likely to be especially relevant.

In the U.S. military, the members generally tasked with facilitating religious accommodation are military chaplains. Chaplains provide for the spiritual health of military personnel and their families, within a "religiously pluralistic environment" (Department of the Air Force, 1999; Military Chaplaincy, 1995). At the same time, chaplains are endorsed representatives of their respective faiths. Consequently, they have the dual obligation of adhering to their personal faith beliefs, while also attending to the spiritual needs of others that may or may not share a similar faith. This potential juxtaposition of faith beliefs with functional role responsibilities may create a unique dilemma for some chaplains (Jones, 1996). Furthermore, the tenets of the chaplains' specific faith group combined with individual interpretations of religious pluralism may generate some discord within the military chaplaincy

as an organization. This paper examines the challenge religious pluralism poses for military chaplains and the chaplaincy. Drawing from literature on religious pluralism and intergroup behavior, along with input from several military chaplains, a conceptual analysis is presented that explores how distinctive views of religious pluralism within the chaplaincy may influence the attitudes and behaviors of military chaplains and the strategic direction of the chaplaincy organization.

A Brief History of the Military Chaplaincy

The Armed Forces (military) chaplaincy dates back to the Revolutionary War when the Continental Congress, in 1775, authorized the appointment of chaplains for the armed Services (Drazin & Currey, 1995). The chaplain's primary purpose was to provide "divine service" for the troops, mainly prayer and religious worship. Today, the chaplain's role has expanded to include many other pastoral duties. In addition to conducting worship services and performing sacraments, chaplains are engaged in family life ministry, youth programs, suicide prevention, counseling, community outreach, leadership advisement, moral and ethics training, and multi-faith accommodation (Department of the Army, 2000; Brinsfield, 1997). Chaplains also provide essential religious and moral support for military personnel during times of war. More than 500 Army unit ministry teams, for instance, were deployed to Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War and many other teams were deployed to peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, Croatia, and Bosnia (Brinsfield, 1997). Presently, there are approximately 5,000 chaplains in the Armed Forces, nearly half of which are members of the Reserve and National Guard.

Military chaplains are certified by ecclesiastical endorsing agencies that represent a wide variety of distinctive faith groups (Military Chaplaincy, 1995). The agencies ensure that persons applying for the chaplaincy are certified clergy, possessing requisite religious qualifications (Drazin & Curry, 1995; Department of Defense, 1993). Any religious group may apply to the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Board (AFCB) to become an ecclesiastical endorser, given they meet certain criteria. Endorsers must be organized exclusively to provide religious ministry to an existing lay constituency and agree to Department of Defense (DoD) regulations and guidelines for selecting qualified clergy representatives (Department of Defense, 1993). The open policy for establishing ecclesiastical endorsers ensures a diverse, though not necessarily equal, representation of faith groups within the chaplaincy. While the majority of chaplains are Protestant, many faith groups are represented, which speaks to the religious diversity within the chaplaincy organization itself (see Table 1).

Table 1
Active Duty Chaplains by Faith Group
As of FY 2000

Major Faith Groups	Army	Navy/ USMC	Air Force	Percent of Total
Protestant	1,153	667	468	82.9%
Catholic	103	178	124	14.7%
Muslim	6	3	1	.4%
Jewish	10	12	7	1.1%
Orthodox	6	11	8	.9%
Total	1,278	871	608	100%

Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense

The chaplaincy's commitment to the free exercise of religion was strengthened in 1986 after a fierce court battle that challenged the constitutionality of the military chaplaincy. In 1979, two Harvard law students filed a civil suit charging that the chaplaincy program (specifically, the Army chaplaincy) violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment, which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (Drazin & Currey, 1995). The students argued that the military chaplaincy constituted an institutionalized religion, favoring religion over non-religion and certain religions over others; thereby prohibiting the free exercise of faith (or lack thereof). Ultimately, the courts sided with the military, stating that the chaplaincy was uniquely designed to meet the specific needs of military personnel. Although no clear legal mandate emerged from the case, the event affirmed the chaplaincy's primary purpose as securing the rights of military personnel to freely exercise their religion (Drazin & Currey, 1995). Thus, chaplains became responsible for "free exercise" rights, regardless of their religious affiliation or the affiliation of the military persons they service (Department of the Army, 2000). Currently, the military chaplaincy represents over 230 distinctive faith groups (Military Chaplaincy, 1995).

Diverse Views of Religious Pluralism

In addition to possessing different faith beliefs, chaplains are also likely to differ in their views of religious pluralism. The religion literature indicates that there are various perspectives of the pluralism concept. According to the literature, each view of religious pluralism is dependent upon the tenets of an individual's faith group and the person's conception of "religion" (cf. Dupis, 1997; Goncalves, 2000; Koyama, 1999; Olkholm & Phillips, 1995; Osman, 1998). As Massanari (1998) describes, if "religion" is associated with Christianity, for example, then pluralism may be conceived as relating to different faith groups that adhere to Christian principles. However, if "religion" is associated with the quest for spiritual meaning and purpose, then pluralism transcends any particular faith group. Thus, the concept of pluralism is subject to

a wide range of interpretations. In an effort to explain the divergent and sometimes combative reactions to religious pluralism, Massanari (1998) developed a typology that broadly classifies the diverse perspectives into three categories: exclusivism, tolerance, and interdependence. As summarized below, their underlying principles and associated actions or agendas define the categories.

The exclusivism perspective of religious pluralism regards diverse religions as different *and* separate. Based on the principle of dualism where realities are categorized as “either/or,” exclusivism differentially distinguishes religions as normative and non-normative. From this perspective, one religion is truth while all others are false; that is, there is one “true” religion. Exclusivists, therefore, disavow pluralism as a threat to the one true faith, firmly dismissing the validity of all other faiths. Indeed, the very idea of pluralism is conceptually incongruent with the belief of a single religious truth. This position often results in efforts to convert those with “non-normative” beliefs in order to create exclusive uniformity with the one “true” faith.

By comparison, the tolerance perspective differs from exclusivism by acknowledging the existence of different religions and advocating the right of diverse religious traditions to exist. Based on the principle of religious liberty, this view posits that in order for one religion to freely exist then all others must be accorded the same freedom. However, this view of religious pluralism does not validate different religious beliefs. Rather, tolerance simply argues for the rights of others to adhere to their chosen beliefs. In essence, tolerance enables religious diversity by protecting the legal right to religious liberty, as specified by the U.S. Bill of Rights. In this regard, supporters of the tolerance view (egalitarians) are likely to eschew forceful efforts to convert others to their faith group. At the same time, they might encourage conversion by willingly sharing the tenets of their faith.

Unlike exclusivism or tolerance, the interdependence view of religious pluralism does not adhere to the dualism principle of separate and different. Instead, interdependence or non-dualism supplants the notion of “either/or” with a position of “both/and.” From this perspective, diverse religions are conceived as interconnected dimensions of each other. Commonalities are emphasized and individual distinctiveness acknowledged. Non-dualism promotes interfaith “harmony” by embracing religious differences and advocating learning from other religious traditions. Thus, faith beliefs become mutable, continuously evolving interpretations of reality. Non-dualists, therefore, actively seek to cultivate unity among divergent faith beliefs.

Table 2 summarizes the three views of religious pluralism as outlined by Massanari (1998). Simply stated, there are those who believe their religion is the only true religion; others who are willing to tolerate different religions; and still others whose faith beliefs are amalgams of multiple religions. Clearly, such divergent perspectives are likely to yield disparate and perhaps conflicting attitudes and behaviors toward religious diversity and religious accommodation. As organizations (including the military) grapple with how best to accommodate diverse religious beliefs, fundamental distinctions related to views of religious pluralism are likely to challenge those efforts. On the surface, accommodation may appear to be a matter of simply instituting policy. However, below the surface are the greater issues of enforcing the policy and the possibility that the policy itself may conflict with the enforcer’s faith beliefs.

Table 2
Views of Religious Pluralism (Massanari, 1998)

View	Principle	Philosophy	Agenda
Exclusivism (Exclusivists)	Dualism “either/or”	Stresses only one “true” religion; all others false	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convert or negate other religions ▪ Exclusive uniformity
Tolerance (Egalitarians)	Religious liberty	Advocates right of other religions to exist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tolerate other religions ▪ Eschew extremism
Interdependence (Non-dualists)	Non-dualism “both/and”	Recognizes commonalities and distinctiveness among religions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Embrace commonness of religions ▪ Cultivate interdependence

Religious Accommodation in the Military

Largely driven by the historic court case and growing multiculturalism within the Services, the military has engaged in a concerted effort to accommodate diverse religious traditions. The Department of Defense is revising its *Accommodation of Religious Practices* directive, last published in 1988, and each branch of service has produced its own accompanying set of instructions (Department of Defense, 1988; Department of the Army, 1999; Department of the Navy, 1997; Department of the Air Force, 1996). The instructions cover everything from observing the “Sabbath”(which differs by faith group) to wearing a Jewish yarmulke with a military uniform to the sacramental use of peyote (a small cactus with hallucinogenic properties) by Native American service members (Department of Defense, 1998). Each guideline or policy instruction includes a variation of the following statement:

A basic principle of our nation is free exercise of religion. The Department of Defense places a high value on the rights of members of the Armed Forces to observe the tenets of their

respective religions. It is DoD policy that requests for accommodation of religious practices should be approved by commanders when accommodation will not have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, standards, or discipline.

(DoD Directive 1300.17)

The accommodation directives attempt to address any area that may potentially inhibit the free exercise of religion. At a minimum the guidelines cover: (1) religious worship and observances, (2) religious apparel, (3) dietary requirements, and (4) medical practices (Huerta & Webb, 2001). These regulations reflect the diverse religious traditions among the many faith groups within the Department of Defense. Some faith groups, for example, worship on days other than Sunday (e.g., Seventh-Day Adventists). Other faith groups prohibit eating certain foods or require particular preparations (e.g., kosher), while others forbid the use of certain medical procedures (e.g., blood transfusions). Still other faith groups require specific rituals at the time of death (e.g., the Last Rites).

The guidelines for accommodating diverse religious traditions stress the enhanced role of chaplains as the guardian's of religious freedom. Service-specific instructions such as Army Regulation 165-1, *Chaplain Activities in the United States Army*, have been significantly amended to underscore the chaplain's responsibility for religious liberty. For example, Section 4-4b reads, "Each chaplain will minister to the personnel of the unit and facilitate the 'free-exercise' rights of all personnel, regardless of religious affiliation of either the chaplain or the unit member" (Department of the Army, 2000). As such, chaplains are required to become knowledgeable about a multitude of religious traditions other than their own. At the same time, each policy directive contains a provision that shields chaplains from performing any duties that conflict with their faith beliefs. "Chaplains will not be required to take part in worship when such participation is at variance with the tenets of their faith" (e.g., Department of the Army, 2000, Section 4-4e). Taken together, chaplains must, therefore, balance their functional role responsibilities with adherence to their faith beliefs. When diverse views of religious pluralism are considered, some chaplains may struggle with the incongruity between religious accommodation and their personal views on religious pluralism.

The Intersection of Pluralism View and Religious Accommodation

Theory and research on intergroup relations is instructive for defining the interrelationship between diverse views of religious pluralism and attitudes and behaviors related to religious accommodation. The intergroup literature speaks to the dynamics that occur between a person's membership group (e.g., race, gender, religious affiliation) and another comparison group. The former is referred to as the "ingroup" and the latter is the "outgroup." Research has shown the ingroup vs. outgroup dynamic to influence a multitude of attitudes and behaviors such as intergroup competition, ingroup favoritism, and outgroup derogation (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Within the context of religious diversity, the intergroup dynamic speaks to the interaction between members of distinct faith groups. This interfaith dynamic is intensified by

diverse views of religious pluralism that ultimately shape reactions toward religious accommodation.

The religion literature suggests the exclusivism view of religious pluralism is most likely to collide with efforts to accommodate diverse religious traditions. Because the concept of pluralism is antithetical to the belief in one true religion, those who subscribe to the exclusivism perspective may resist accommodation efforts and possibly even subvert them (Massanari, 1998). For exclusivists, increased religious diversity signifies a threat that should be eliminated rather than a cultural movement that should be embraced (Loveland, 1996; Massanari, 1998; Pipes, 2000). The idea that other groups are perceived as a "threat" results in certain attitudes and behaviors directed toward those groups (Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). Research on intergroup relations shows these outcomes are greatest when the outgroup is believed to be a competitive threat (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). From the exclusivists' perspective, other faith groups may threaten their sectarian worldview, impede their ability to convert others, and/or hinder their efforts to promote their specific values and beliefs within an organizational system (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999). Exclusivists, therefore, are likely to express some degree of antipathy toward religious diversity and resist any efforts toward religious accommodation (Loveland, 1996).

Another consequence of perceived competition between faith groups is outgroup derogation; that is, the tendency to disparage other groups (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Research shows that derogation often takes the form of negative stereotyping, which enables the ingroup to profess superiority over the outgroup (Crocker et al., 1998). For exclusivists, justifying the "one true religion" position would seem to necessitate disparaging all other faith beliefs. The "either/or" principle underlying exclusivism indicates the elevation of one faith group while subordinating all other faith groups (Loveland, 1996; Pipes, 2000). This derogation frequently translates into animosity toward other religions and possibly prejudice and discrimination (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1993).

Because of this aversion toward other faith groups, exclusivists may become distressed in interfaith settings. Such distress is referred to as intergroup anxiety, reflecting discomfort interacting with dissimilar others (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Research shows that intergroup anxiety amplifies feelings toward outgroup members, especially feelings of prejudice (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan, Ageyev, Coates-Shrider, Stephan, & Abalakina, 1994). As a result, exclusivists may try to avoid intergroup contact, opting not to participate in activities that would involve interfaith interaction (Driggs, 2001; Loveland, 1996). When avoidance is not possible, the presence of other faith groups may, instead, intensify exclusivists' commitment to their ideology and provoke fervent justification of their faith beliefs – merely strengthening their resolve to convert others (Burris & Jackson, 2000). In essence, exclusivists object to pluralism and lament the push toward ecumenism (i.e., interfaith cooperation). For them, accommodation is viewed as a compromise to their faith beliefs. Any requirement to compromise is likely to be resisted.

Conversely, those who subscribe to the tolerance view of religious pluralism (egalitarians) do not see other religions as a threat to their faith group or their religious traditions. Instead, egalitarians believe it is possible to coexist with other faith groups while remaining

secure in their own faith beliefs (Loveland, 1996; Massanari, 1998). The ability to coexist is driven largely by egalitarians' commitment to religious liberty. Supporting the rights of others to freely exercise their religious beliefs guarantees religious freedom for all religions, including the egalitarians' religion. Furthermore, egalitarians do not accept the notion that protecting free exercise rights equates to relinquishing their own faith beliefs or endorsing the beliefs of others (Massanari, 1998). Rather, egalitarians maintain a sense of security that is grounded in the foundation of their particular faith and their personal commitment to the tenets of that faith (e.g., Loveland, 1996, p. 312). By personalizing the faith relationship, egalitarians reduce perceived intergroup (faith) competition, thereby engendering a willingness to tolerate other religions and champion religious accommodation.

Research on intergroup relations suggests that in the absence of intergroup competition, distinct groups can develop intergroup cooperation (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989). When groups focus on a mutual goal (e.g., religious liberty) or overarching similarities, they are able to attend to commonalities without allowing differences to impede their interaction (Seta, Seta, & Culver, 2000). In this sense, egalitarians perhaps acknowledge a "greater community of faith believers" – irrespective of their feelings toward any particular faith group. In doing so, they establish a base for inclusion rather than exclusion and foster intergroup cooperation. Egalitarians, therefore, are able to support religious diversity and accommodation without sacrificing their specific faith-group identity. Importantly, this ecumenical spirit may be most available among faith groups with similar religious foundations (e.g., monotheistic faiths that believe in "One God"). Extreme religious differences (e.g., Christianity vs. Paganism) may elicit limitations on certain accommodation efforts (Jorgensen & Russell, 1999; Cookson, 1997).

Despite egalitarians' tendency toward tolerance, negative feelings about certain religious groups may be unavoidable. Research shows that even the most well-intended persons are not free from stereotypes and prejudice (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). In the absence of perceived intergroup competition, individuals still inherently favor their group over another group (Brewer & Brown, 1998). This favoritism may result in subtle prejudices and unintentional discrimination (Crocker et al, 1998; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). In a religious context, distinctiveness among faith groups and differences in the groups' foundational beliefs lend themselves to stereotyping and prejudice (Kirkpatrick, 1993; Bolce & DeMaio, 1999). The differences (real or perceived) can lead to stigmatization of certain faith groups (Crocker, et al., 1998). Stigma conveys a negative opinion of these groups, frequently pointing to "fallacies" in the faith groups' fundamental beliefs (Cookson, 1997). The stigma devalues the group, reflecting a form of subtle prejudice (Crocker et al., 1998). In this regard, devaluing a faith group contradicts the principle of religious freedom. Egalitarians, therefore, must be careful to suppress negative feelings about certain faith groups and the impulse to engage in debates about religious beliefs.

Furthermore, the deeply affective nature of religion makes it difficult to fully integrate fairness values with religious convictions, especially when faced with contradictory beliefs (e.g., Christianity and Judaism). It may be impossible to separate feelings about a particular faith group from personal faith beliefs. Consequently, egalitarians may experience some level of interpersonal conflict between their desire to be tolerant toward other faiths and their commitment to their own faith beliefs. When this conflict arises, egalitarians may cope by

compromising some religious traditions as the situation dictates (e.g., using a generic prayer in interfaith settings). In doing so, egalitarians compartmentalize the situational context and the affective attachment to their faith group beliefs. Separating the two would allow egalitarians to keep their faith foundation in tact. In order to preserve that foundation and remain secure in their beliefs, however, egalitarians are likely to limit the extent of their compromise.

Different from exclusivists and egalitarians, non-dualists experience intergroup dynamics based on group permeability (i.e., ease of joining or exiting a group) rather than competition or cooperation. Because the interdependence view of pluralism seeks to embrace faith group similarities and differences, there is an absence of competitiveness or mere tolerance. Non-dualists are open to interfaith interaction and represent multi-faith unity. Possessing a nonexclusive ideology, non-dualists develop their beliefs by melding the beliefs of other faith groups (Jorgensen & Russell, 1999; www.uua.org). Since their religious practices are not fixed entities, non-dualists are not concerned about preserving religious traditions or foundational faith beliefs (Jorgensen & Russell, 1999; Massanari, 1998, www.uua.org). Moreover, the openness to diverse beliefs among members of non-dualistic faith groups diminishes negative perceptions of or prejudices toward other faith groups, leading to greater acceptance of religious diversity and religious accommodation (Gonclaves, 2000).

The diffusion of faith beliefs among non-dualist faith groups embodies ecumenism, reflecting a certain respect for different religious traditions. In the quest for spiritual unity, non-dualists transcend religious boundaries and converge into interfaith harmony (Goncalves, 2000). They often promote interfaith initiatives to engender greater unity among faith groups. Because of the fluidity of non-dualistic faiths, in which multiple belief systems are continually synthesized, non-dualists do not conceive of their relationship with other faith groups as “we” vs. “they.” Rather, the interdependence of multiple faith beliefs limits the sense of group distinctiveness and instead yields a harmonious “us” (Goncalves, 2000; www.uua.org).

At the same time, however, non-dualist faith groups typically are the religious minority. As such, they often are made to feel marginalized among more traditional faith groups (Jorgensen & Russell, 1999; Loveland, 1996). Because of the fluidity of their beliefs or their contradiction with “mainstream” (e.g., monotheistic) faiths, non-dualists’ face challenges to their right to exist and/or their accommodation needs from other faith groups (Cookson, 1997; Jorgensen & Russell, 1999). Therefore, non-dualist seek more than accommodation of their religious practices, they also desire a greater acceptance of their faith values (Cookson, 1997; Jorgensen & Russell, 1999, www.uua.org).

In sum, the interaction between views of religious pluralism and attitudes and behaviors toward religious diversity and religious accommodation is complex. As summarized in Table 3, each pluralism view yields unique intergroup dynamics, specific perspectives toward ecumenism, varied responses to religious accommodation, and particular methods for coping with interfaith interaction. This complexity has implications for the military chaplaincy. Diverse responses to pluralism and accommodation by military chaplains is likely to influence the chaplaincy’s efforts to provide religious support for Service personnel and may create some discord within the chaplaincy itself.

Table 3
The Interaction Between Religious Pluralism View and Religious Accommodation

	Exclusivism (Exclusivists)	Tolerance (Egalitarians)	Interdependence (Non-dualists)
Intergroup dynamic	Perceives intergroup (faith) competition Outgroup derogation Intergroup (faith) anxiety	Favors intergroup (faith) cooperation Subtle prejudice Interpersonal conflict	Reflects group permeability Non-exclusive unity Interfaith harmony
Attitude toward ecumenism	Rejects	Favors	Embodies
Attitude toward religious accommodation	Resists	Champions	Seeks acceptance
Interfaith coping strategy	Avoidance and justification	Compromise with limits	Transcend boundaries

A “Pluralism” Dialogue

In developing this analysis, a series of informal discussions occurred with six military chaplains, one Catholic and five Protestant, of various denominations. The group included chaplains from two different Services and a reserve component. Each spoke freely about his experiences as a chaplain and his perspective on pluralism within the military chaplaincy. Even among this small group, disparate views of religious pluralism were revealed. While most seemed to adhere to the tolerance view, others appeared to subscribe to exclusivism ideals. Also apparent were divergent views among different denominations. It appears that “pluralism” issues within the chaplaincy are driven as much by interdenominational differences as interfaith diversity.

On balance, most of the chaplains agreed that facilitating religious freedom was one of their primary responsibilities. They stressed that chaplains must be able to allow others the free exercise of their faith, irrespective of whether they agree or disagree with others’ beliefs. As one chaplain stated, “I am sworn to uphold the Constitution. That is why I put on this uniform.” Yet, another chaplain expressed concern that the chaplaincy placed too much emphasis on

“political correctness,” which he suggested forced chaplains to suppress their faith beliefs. For example, several of the chaplains recalled a situation where they were asked to remove the Bibles from the pews of the base chapel for a Jewish wedding. Some viewed this accommodation as part of their duty. Another, however, felt yielding to this accommodation was a compromise of faith beliefs. This chaplain also indicated a degree of discomfort interacting with clergy of different faiths, reflecting the interfaith anxiety most likely to be experienced by exclusivists.

During the discussions, the chaplains pointed to interdenominational discord as an equally important concern within the chaplaincy. It appears that faith group identity among chaplains (e.g., Christian, Jewish, Muslim) is yielding to “denominational” group identity (e.g., Evangelical, Episcopalian, Methodist), adding another dimension to the already complex pluralism issue. Certain religious practices among some religions are not shared by all denominations. Consequently, there is disagreement about what duties a chaplain should or should not perform. For instance, the chaplains explained that liturgical denominations such as Methodist, Episcopal, and Lutheran baptize babies into their faith, granting “membership” at the time of baptism. Whereas, non-liturgical denominations such as Pentecostal and Evangelical do not believe in baby baptism and instead require a personal (verbal) profession of faith beliefs (at any age) for adoption into the church body. Since chaplains are not required to perform any duty that contradicts the tenets of their faith, the chaplains whose faith beliefs do not allow baby baptism generally opt to identify another chaplain who could comply with a military person’s request. Thus, while this group of chaplains demonstrated a basic tolerance for other religions and a willingness to accommodate different religious practices, they also placed limits on the extent of their compromise.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the pluralism dialogue was the various ways in which these chaplains balanced commitment to their faith with loyalty to the military. Some admitted struggling with becoming a “religious chameleon” while trying to do their job and stay true to their faith. This struggle is most evident in the issue of public prayer – a very delicate subject for the chaplaincy. Chaplains are called upon to pray at numerous military occasions such as changes of command, retirement ceremonies, memorial observances, command meetings, etc. (Public Prayer, <http://www.sheppard.af.mil/82trwhc/ppryxg.htm>). The challenge is whether chaplains should pray according to the tenets of their faith or pray in a more neutral manner to be sensitive to the diverse beliefs of those present during an occasion.

One approach described by the chaplains is to close a prayer by saying, “In the Name of Our Lord,” with the understanding that “Our Lord” may mean different things to different people. For instance, Muslims may interpret “Our Lord” as meaning Allah, whereas Jehovah Witnesses may interpret “Our Lord” to mean Jehovah or Yahweh. Another manner in which these chaplains address the challenge of public prayer is by making the distinction between mandatory assemblies such as change of command and award ceremonies and voluntary occasions such as a group meeting. In the latter setting, chaplains are typically asked to represent their faith and, therefore, pray according to the tenets of their faith beliefs. In public settings, chaplains are participating in a religious tradition of the military and, instead, pray in a manner that is inclusive rather than exclusive.

Importantly, not all of the chaplains in this group adopted these compromise strategies. Some felt that closing a prayer in a manner different from the tenets of their faith infringed upon their rights to religious liberty and the freedom to express their faith beliefs. Their solution is to incorporate inclusive language in the text of the prayer, while closing the prayer according to their specific beliefs. Other chaplains limit their participation in activities that may require a compromise altogether. Still others are organizationally aligned with their particular faith group, thereby shielding them from interfaith activities that would require religious sensitivity.

Together, the chaplains who participated in the dialogue provided a number of interesting insights into the pluralism issue within the military chaplaincy. They also pointed to additional concerns such as the declining number of Catholic priests, the increasing discord between liturgical and evangelical chaplains, pay as factor in recruitment and retention, and differences between military instructions and endorser requirements. Despite the pressures some felt as a result of functioning in a religiously pluralistic environment, most emphasized their duty to provide for religious freedom. As one stated, “We must be able to separate ourselves from what others need . . . *providing* ministry is our constitutional obligation.”

Organizational Challenges for the Chaplaincy

Organizations adjusting to religiously diverse work environments will likely experience some tension between work and religion among its members (Bennett, 2001). The military chaplaincy is no exception. In the chaplaincy, the tension created by religious accommodation is compounded by the chaplain’s dual obligation to the military organization and their ecclesiastical endorser. At times, requirements from the two organizational entities may conflict. On the one hand, chaplains are required by law to provide religious ministry to military service personnel, regardless of faith. This is their functional role responsibility. On the other hand, as determined by their faith beliefs, the chaplain’s ecclesiastical endorser may dictate what functions their chaplains should and should not perform. This is their faith role responsibility. Chaplains must, therefore, reconcile their commitment to their faith with their loyalty to their country.

For example, while the military discourages chaplains from proselytizing about their faith beliefs with the purpose of converting others who are affiliated, chaplains retain the right to evangelize (The Covenant and Code of Ethics, 1995). For some faith groups, however, proselytizing is a key component of their faith doctrine and encouraged by the ecclesiastical endorser. Some endorsers view the prohibition of proselytizing as an infringement upon their chaplain’s rights to religious liberty (Loveland, 1996). As a compromise, some chaplains from these faith groups restrict their proselytizing to religious settings (e.g., worship services) – despite the many opportunities to proselytizing during counseling – in order to maintain their accountability to both the military and their endorsers/faith.

In addition to variance between the military chaplaincy and ecclesiastical endorsers, the chaplaincy organization may continue to experience some discord among chaplains of different faiths. In 1993, for example, the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Board accessioned its first Muslim chaplain (Elasser, 1999). While hailed as a bold step toward greater religious diversity within the military, the action was objectionable to some chaplains because beliefs of Islam contradicted their faith beliefs. Reflective of the exclusivism perspective, some chaplains view the growing

religious diversity within the chaplaincy as a threat to their faith group and faith beliefs (Loveland, 1996). To defuse some of the tension, the chaplaincy has a policy of “cooperative pluralism” in which chaplains agree to cooperate with one another without compromising their religious beliefs (Loveland, 1996). The philosophy emphasizes ecumenical understanding while discouraging narrow sectarian views (Loveland, 1996). Cooperative pluralism is incorporated into chaplaincy training programs and endorsers are required to select persons for the chaplaincy who are willing to work in cooperation with chaplains from different faiths (Department of Defense, 1993).

In general, the chaplaincy has adopted a strong stance towards the rights of individuals to practice their faith. As an organization, the chaplaincy is equally committed to embracing religious diversity among chaplains. This commitment is reflected in the decision to sanction chaplain insignia representative of diverse religious beliefs. Chaplains wear insignia that represent different faith beliefs such as the Cross (Christianity), Tablets (Judaism), Crescent (Islam) and the Wheel (Buddhists). This action is indicative of the chaplaincy’s dedication to religious freedom within the chaplaincy organization and the military community.

Conclusion

In this era of multiculturalism, religious diversity has emerged as a critical issue within organizations (Bennett, 2001). Increasingly, organizations are amending their diversity policies and practices to accommodate the diverse religious beliefs of their workers (Anonymous, 2000). Like its civilian counterparts, the military also is striving to accommodate the growing faith groups among its ranks (Elsasser, 1999). The context of religious diversity in the military is perhaps most challenging for military chaplains. Although endorsed representatives of their respective faith groups, chaplains are required to operate in religiously diverse environments. This unique dual position may, at times, present a tension between being faithful to their own faith beliefs and the requirement to accommodate the beliefs of others. This conflict may be exacerbated by the chaplain’s views of religious pluralism and related attitudes and behaviors as a result of those views.

The literature suggests that three views of religious pluralism – exclusivism, tolerance, and interdependence – are likely to result in unique responses to religious accommodation. These varied consequences were evident in the conversations with the six military chaplains. The chaplains revealed different levels of tolerance and willingness to support religious accommodation. The discussions suggested that most military chaplains are likely to adopt a tolerance perspective, demonstrating their commitment to religious freedom. Chaplains who adhere to the exclusivism view, by comparison, are likely to be the minority. However, exclusivism may be growing as the representation of certain faith groups in the military increases and others decrease. Additionally, non-dualist chaplains representing “non-mainstreams” faiths may continue to feel marginalized because of the lack of acceptance of their faith doctrines (Loveland, 1996). In all, an understanding of the diverse views of religious pluralism in the military context is fundamental to supporting and advancing an equal opportunity environment for all members, including members of the chaplaincy.

This paper just “taps” the surface of an important issue for the military. The analysis attempted to frame the issues facing the chaplaincy within the theoretical context of religious pluralism views. There are perhaps numerous areas for future research on this topic. First, a more extensive study involving personal interviews with military chaplains, along with a comprehensive survey, across Services, faiths, and denominations would highlight the diversity of opinions and experiences on the subject of pluralism. Second, with respect to religious accommodation, it would be important to assess quantitatively how the military is meeting its accommodation objectives. Ultimately, this line of research could be helpful for forming policy and determining the future direction of the chaplaincy.

Author’s Note: It would seem that all of us who profess commitment to a particular faith belief have some degree of exclusivist in us. Otherwise, how then would we justify our own faith beliefs. At the same time, we exist in a multicultural, pluralistic society, which at a minimum requires a respect for different individuals, even if we disagree with their religious beliefs (or lack thereof). As a wise person said recently, “We must learn to disagree without being disagreeable.”

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